

October 3, 2006

2006 FULTON MALL REPORT

At their March 14, 2006 meeting, the City Council directed the City Manager and the Redevelopment Director to appoint staff to work with community members to oversee the collection of data through a public process so Council and the Agency can make a decision on how to proceed with the Fulton Mall, and identify resources or funding as deemed necessary to ensure a successful community event. This report provides the results of the research and community discussion, and makes recommendations for further action. All comments and correspondence received during the study period are included in the report.

A working group was formed to conduct research on other malls, develop and implement a community process, and analyze the results. The public input process began with the City of Fresno and One-by-One Leadership hosting a series of public meetings in July and August to discuss the future of the Fulton Mall. As a reference for the meetings, the Mayor's Creative Economy Council's January 2006 report identified the Fulton Mall as an area of importance, citing the lack of nightlife on and around the Mall as a reason for the City to consider ways to revitalize the area.

The Fulton Mall Working Group Members are:

David Cisneros, RDA
Randy Cooper, City of Fresno
Kurt Madden, One by One Leadership
Marlene Murphey, RDA
Deborah Nankivell, Fresno Business Journal
Jon Ruiz, City of Fresno
Terri Saldivar, City of Fresno
Craig Sharton, California Valley Business Incubator
Nicole Zieba, City of Fresno
Paul Pierce, Facilitator and Dr. Jackie Ryle facilitated the public meetings.

The Working Group developed and implemented the public process.

Fulton Mall Working Group Process

Three initial community meetings were held on July 12th at the Ted C. Wills Center, July 14th, at the Arte Americas, and July 17th, at the T.W Patterson Building. The attendees were asked to list on a 3 X 5 card their suggestions, concerns, problems, dreams, components and issues that they believed would benefit the revitalization of the Fulton Mall. All participants also were given the opportunity to verbally give their ideas. All the comments were recorded.

The Working Group meeting analyzed and synthesized all the ideas and information that had been received so far and planned the next outreach meetings. The Group analyzed the results of the three meetings, along with previous plans, email input and research of other cities to be presented at the next round of community meetings.

Two additional Open House meetings were held on August 15th at the Security Bank Building and August 16th at Fresno City Hall. The purpose of these two Open House meetings was to obtain additional public input on specific ideas based on past Fulton Mall studies, information on similar downtown malls throughout the USA, input from the first three meetings, and other sources of information – email, web site, letters, media, etc.

Fulton Mall Background

The Fulton Mall was completed in September of 1964 during a period of time when many cities in the United States were experimenting with pedestrian malls in downtown areas. It was thought by communities that this was a way to compete with the new modern shopping malls. By 1997 there were about 30 of 200 pedestrian malls left in the United States. The one main reason for the demise of pedestrian malls was the cut-off of automobile traffic from retailers. Of the remaining pedestrian malls, there are still some successful ones remaining. In California, the Third Street Promenade in Santa Monica is a tourist attraction as well as The Grove in Los Angeles and Santana Row in San Jose.

There is a renewal of interest in pedestrian malls now known as auto-free zones today in metropolitan areas, across the United States and Europe. Travel in these zones would typically be by foot, bicycle or horse drawn carriage.

Fulton Mall Today

Today, Downtown Fresno is in a state of near-daily transition and, now more than ever, revitalizing the Mall will take creative thinking and a willingness to act boldly to re-create the Fulton Mall as a destination and community jewel. Below is a partial list of observations of changes to the Mall in recent years.

- Limited retail shopping.
- Traffic flow has been obstructed on the diagonals due to Stadium and IRS Buildings.
- New Stadium business and traffic.
- Kern Street Revitalization.
- Government offices on the Mall.
- Vacant buildings.
- Residential development (JC Penny building).
- Empty at night – no night life.
- Art work has been restored and fountains working.
- New benches.
- No grocery store downtown.

The general feeling during the community meetings was that we have been through this before and we just need to start implementing the existing Policy: Central Area Community Plan (1989) and the 2025 General Plan. Both documents were reviewed and approved into policy by the City Council and are utilized by the Development Department and the Redevelopment Agency to determine policy. With this in mind, the following general themes emerged during the community meetings:

Themes of Community Meetings

- No traffic on the Mall.
- Enhance the park features, more green, fountains.
- More residential.
- Traditional and non-traditional shopping.
- Vibrant night life, things to do after 5:00 p.m.
- Clean and safe.

- Honor existing users, investors.

Based on community input during the study, research of other malls, and review of previous studies, the Working Group offers the following:

- Form an Implementation Task Force of stakeholders to guide the implementation of specific actions, including thorough business and community analysis of proposals. The Chamber of Commerce is considering chairing the Task Force.
- Include a detailed traffic study to improve Mall access as part of the current Downtown Transportation Plan. The goal of the study is to define and evaluate transportation alternatives that will make the city more accessible and attractive to visitors and Downtown residents, with an emphasis on providing mobility appropriate for a major city. The Plan will address a wide range of Downtown transportation issues including:
 - i. Access and circulation demands;
 - ii. One-way versus two-way street circulation;
 - iii. The Fulton Mall;
 - iv. Integration of bus and other forms of transit;
 - v. Pedestrian access and traffic calming;
 - vi. Supply, location and policies for parking;
 - vii. Visitor way-finding;
 - viii. Railroad and freeway banners; and
 - ix. Integration of high-speed rail.

Whether or not to open traffic to the Mall, or to improve access by other means, remains an open issue. Most of the participants of the Study's outreach efforts want to keep the Fulton Mall primarily a pedestrian mall; however, the community process was not specifically set up to address this issue. Before any decision can be made concerning vehicle traffic on the Mall, the Working Group strongly supports the completion of a traffic engineering study as part of the Downtown Transportation Plan. To make a decision prior to this effort would be premature.

- Consider establishing a City matching fund from a future Parks Bond issue to implement specific actions proposed by the Implementation Task Force
- Focus major redevelopment efforts on the south blocks – between Tulare and Inyo – first. Particular emphasis must be on the aggressive redevelopment of the Gottschalks, Berkeley, Luftenburgs and Mammoth Mall buildings as a priority, including the possible demolition of one or more of the buildings. Mixed use, housing, retail, theaters or recreation centers, must be developed as the anchor to the revitalization of the Fulton Mall.

Several items were highlighted during the input process, including:

- Bring a several-days-a-week farmers market to Mariposa Plaza as envisioned in the ELS Fulton Street Revitalization report. While insisting on basic levels of public safety and cleanliness, and high product quality, market operators can make fresh produce sales a regular reality. A regular farmers market would bring new pedestrian life to the Mall and would celebrate the root of our Valley's agricultural economy. Demountable tent frames used in many cities can occupy the square on market days until the market outgrows this venue and seeks a more permanent presence.

- Invest more money in the façade improvement program. Currently the program provides matching funds of \$2,500. That's enough to install steel security bars, but it is not enough to restore a historic façade covered by late-model vinyl. The City of Redding runs a façade improvement program with matching loans up to \$7,500. Stockton offers a \$10,000 forgivable loan, plus a \$10,000 matching grant, plus \$2,500 for architectural assistance. Additional money for the façade program could come from a PBID.
- Wire the remainder of the Mall for wi-fi. The Mariposa Plaza is currently wired, but the entire Mall could be wired.
- Hire a professional landscape architect to assess the current situation to ensure a healthy landscape and provide recommendations to the Implementation Task Force.
- Adopt comprehensive adaptive re-use policies and ordinances, and accompanying zoning and permitting changes that encourage and promote the redevelopment of buildings on and around the Fulton Mall.
- Restore the water features in what are now dirt-filled planters on the Mall. Adding "new" water features would play to the Mall's competitive advantage as an urban oasis in the middle of the hot Valley.
- Install permanent restrooms on the Mall. The Mall should be pedestrian-ready at all times. Many women, in particular, feel uncomfortable entering a parking garage alone to find a permanent public restroom. People in general are loath to use a smelly portable unit that lacks running water.
- Create a Fulton Mall Property Based Improvement District (PBID) to financially support implementation of the above and future recommendations, events, and safety and clean up. A Fulton Mall PBID must coordinate with an overall districting plan within the Downtown triangle.

Many additional ideas were presented during the community input process. The Implementation Task Force should thoroughly review the ideas and further analyze those that have merit.

The Working Group wishes to extend a special thank you to Dr. Jackie Ryle and Paul Pierce for their excellent and professional facilitation of the public meetings. The Group also acknowledges Terri Saldivar for her hours of dedicated research and support of the project.